

Jealousy

Today I am looking at what we can learn about jealousy from children. One of the earliest stories told about me was as a two-year-old. I was being read to by an aunt who had come to visit. My new baby brother Peter was brought in to be admired. My Aunt said coaxingly "Richard, who's that?" I looked round and saw that it was the interloper. "That?" I said "That's nobody."

Jealousy is a very difficult emotion to cope with, not only when you are small and suddenly having to share your Mother's attention with a wailing infant. It is also an emotion without any redeeming feature, though we do sometimes use the word (with a different feeling) when we speak of "jealously guarding" something. Jealousy or Envy is one of what used to be called the "Seven Deadly Sins" (together with anger, gluttony, greed, lust, sloth and pride). In fact calling them "Deadly" is misleading. The seven have been chosen as headline titles, so greed will include avarice and selfishness. Jealousy is the emotion that makes us want to deny equal rights to others. It leads us to being unfair or even cruel to those who have done us no harm. My baby brother had done me no harm, though his arrival had certainly led to the forced sharing of my Mother's attention. No doubt I became more difficult and demanding, but that only made it more difficult for me to have the simple loving relationship I saw as my right.

This seems to be effect of all these "Headline" sins. They harm the "sinner" quite as much as the victim, and sometimes this damage is worse than anything we could have wished to inflict on the other. They work like a maggot in an apple, devouring us from inside. I think my Parents must have done a pretty good job, because I am now very fond of Peter and in fact have just had a holiday with him and his wife. My Parents must have found the way to defuse my sense of injustice and taught me how to share. If only we could all be that successful.